

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 OMB-01 AID-05 IO-13 SSM-03 /078 W
-----291136Z 047323 /21

R 290914Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3845
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY DOHA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 1992

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR LE US
SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT HELOU

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT HELOU IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE
POSSIBILITY OF SOLVING ANYTHING AND THINKS BEST APPROACH TO
LEBANESE PROBLEM IS PIECEMEAL ONE OF COOPERATION ON NON-
SENSITIVE ISSUES WITH HOPE IT CAN BE BROADENED INTO SOMETHING
GREATER. END SUMMARY.

2. PAID COURTESY CALL ON EX-PRESIDENT CHARLES HELOU IN HIS
HOUSE AT KASLIK (JOUNIEH) APRIL 27. GAVE HIM STANDARD RESUME
OF OUR POSITION AND OUR DESIRE TO HELP LEBANON IN ITS TRAVAIL.
HELOU LAUNCHED INTO 45-MINUTE PHILOSOPHICAL LECTURE WHICH,
ALTHOUGH OVERLY LONG, WAS RATHER INTERESTING. HE SAID
HE BELIEVED THERE WERE SOME PROBLEMS WHICH COULD
NEVER BE SOLVED AND ONLY WAY OF DEALING WITH THEM
WAS TO CHANGE CIRCUMSTANCES SO THAT THEY BECAME
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OBSOLETE OR UNIMPORTANT. ALTHOUGH PALESTINE PROBLEM
WAS CERTAINLY A MAJOR BURDEN TO LEBANON, HE FRANKLY
DID NOT THINK WE WOULD SUCCEED IN BRINGING ABOUT A
SETTLEMENT. PEOPLE OF MIDDLE EAST WERE STILL IN
MIDDLE AGES IN TERMS OF THEIR ATTACHMENT TO RELIGION
AND RELIGIOUS OBJECTS. THERE WERE THINGS THEY WERE
SIMPLY UNPREPARED TO GIVE UP AT WHATEVER COST.

JERUSALEM WAS A CASE IN POINT. NEITHER JEW NOR MOSLEM WOULD BE PREPARED TO SURRENDER TITLE TO THAT CITY WHICH WAS HOLY TO BOTH OF THEM AND WHICH WAS PART OF THEIR SOUL. SETTLEMENT BY NEGOTIATION MEANT THAT EACH PARTY MUST MAKE CONCESSIONS IN RETURN FOR CONCESSIONS BY OTHER SIDE. BUT IN THIS CASE NEITHER SIDE WAS ABLE TO MAKE THOSE CONCESSIONS. IT WAS TRUE THAT WE MIGHT GET A PARTIAL SETTLEMENT IN THE SINAI OR SOME PLACE ELSE, BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH PRESSURE WE PUT ON ISRAELIS, THERE WERE THINGS THEY HAD TO GIVE UP IN ORDER TO HAVE AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT WHICH THEY WOULD NOT GIVE. SAME WAS TRUE OF ARABS, WHO WERE NOT GOING TO GIVE CONVINCING TESTIMONY OF THEIR WILLINGNESS TO ABANDON THE STRUGGLE WITH THE ENEMY.

3. EVERYONE IN LEBANON WAS TALKING OF WHAT THEY WOULD DO IN THE WAKE OF A SETTLEMENT, BUT NO ONE WAS TALKING ABOUT WHAT THEY WOULD DO IF THERE WERE NO SETTLEMENT. HE DID NOT WANT TO BE A PESSIMIST BUT FELT HE MUST BE REALISTIC. LEBANON SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON WHAT IT WAS GOING TO DO IN THE ABSENCE OF A SETTLEMENT. MOST PRESSING PROBLEM WAS THAT OF PALESTINIANS, FOR WHICH HE DID NOT HAVE SOLUTION. PERHAPS SOME PROGRESS COULD BE MADE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO ACCORDS, BUT THIS WOULD NOT REALLY SOLVE THE PROBLEM. INDEED, PROBLEM WAS PROBABLY INSOLUBLE BY DIRECT MEANS AND SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE WHILE PEOPLE CONCENTRATED ON THINGS THAT WERE POSSIBLE.

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4. HE HAD CERTAIN SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS HE HAD MADE TO PRESIDENT SARKIS THE DAY BEFORE WHICH MIGHT HELP. HIS PHILOSOPHY WAS THAT LEBANESE SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON THOSE NON-SENSITIVE AREAS WHERE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE VARIOUS CONFESSIONS WAS POSSIBLE. HE DID NOT THINK THEY WERE READY FOR A DIALOGUE ON THE SENSITIVE ISSUES. RATHER, HE THOUGHT GOVERNMENT SHOULD SET PACE BY SIMPLY GOING AHEAD AND CREATING STRUCTURES AND ACTIVITIES WHERE MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS COULD WORK TOGETHER. HIS IDEAS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

A. CREATION OF A SENATE. HE HAD ORIGINALLY OPPOSED THIS IDEA BUT NOW FELT IT WOULD BE A USEFUL DEVICE AS A PLACE TO PUT OLDER POLITICIANS AND GIVE THEM A SENSE OF PRESTIGE AND POSITION WHILE AT THE SAME TIME LESSENING THEIR ABILITY TO MAKE POLITICAL TROUBLE. REAL WORK OF THE PARLIAMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 1992

B. CREATION OF AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
WHICH WOULD ADVISE ON THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF
THE COUNTRY AND DO SOMETHING ABOUT ITS SOCIAL PROBLEMS.
(RELATION OF THIS DOBY TO COUNCIL FOR RECONSTRUCTION
AND DEVELOPMENT NOT CLEAR.)

5. HE VISUALIZED WORK BEGINNING IN A MODEST WAY ON
NON-CONTROVERSIAL PROJECTS WITH FOREIGN FINANCING
(WHICH HAD NOT BEEN FORTHCOMING TO DATE). IN MEANTIME
THE UNWORKABLE PROPOSITION OF PARTITION SHOULD BE
IGNORED. HELOU INDICATED THAT HE AND OTHERS WERE
TRYING TO START THE LIMITED TYPE OF COOPERATION HE
HAD DISCUSSED.

6. I ASKED HELOU HOW MANY MARONITES HE THOUGHT
SUPPORTED THE LEBANON FRONT. HE SAID HE DID NOT WANT
TO GIVE ANY STATISTICS. HE THOUGHT MANY MARONITES HAD
RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE FRONT BUT EVERY MARONITE
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DEEP DOWN INSIDE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE WHAT THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT. THE QUESTION WAS WHETHER THEY WERE PREPARED TO PAY THE PRICE. THAT WAS WHERE THE RESERVATIONS CAME IN. PERHAPS SOME COMPROMISE INVOLVING POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALIZATION, IN WHICH THE PROVINCES WOULD ELECT THEIR OWN GOVERNOR AND THEIR OWN MUNICIPAL COUNCILS AND BE ALLOWED TO COLLECT TAXES, WOULD ANSWER COMMON DESIRE FOR AUTONOMY, ALTHOUGH IT WOULD NOT GIVE THE MARONITES REAL SECURITY. IN FACT, EVERYBODY REALIZED THAT THE FRONT'S GOALS WERE PROBABLY UNATTAINABLE, BUT FACED WITH THE CHOICE BETWEEN SUPPORTING THE FRONT AND OPTING FOR THE UNKNOWN, MOST PEOPLE WOULD CHOOSE TO SUPPORT THE FRONT. AT LEAST IT HAD PRINCIPLES, LEADERSHIP AND DETERMINATION. ITS PLAN MIGHT BE UNWORKABLE, BUT WHO KNOWS, PERHAPS A HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW THE FACT THAT THEY HAD TAKEN A STAND WOULD PAY OFF. IN THEIR CURRENT UNCERTAINTIES THE MARONITIES NEEDED LEADERS AND WOULD FOLLOW THEM.

7. COMMENT: HELOU HAS THE BENEFIT OF RICH EXPERIENCE AND A SHARP MIND. HE WAS NOT A GREAT LEADER, AND ADMITS IT, BUT HE IS THE MOST INTELLIGENT OF THE EX-PRESIDENTS. AS A NON-POLITICAL FIGURE HE HAS A CERTAIN DETACHMENT WHICH PERMITS HIM TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT PUTTING THEM INTO EFFECT, THUS LETTING HIM SPEAK THE UNSPEAKABLE. HE MAY BE UNDULY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF ACCOMMODATION AND SETTLEMENT OF PROBLEMS, BUT HIS VIEW OF THE DIFFICULTIES IS REALISTIC.
PARKER

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Message Attributes

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Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2815025
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT HELOU
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, US, LE, (HELOU, CHARLES)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a341b2a5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
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